

FT View

Depoliticising the Police

THE furore over the transfer of DIG M.R. Lathif, allegedly on the protest of Cabinet Minister Sumedha Jayasena, has provided a disturbing insight into the fate of law abiding public servants. It is alleged that the controversial removal of the Monaragala Police Division from Lathif was prompted by an incident involving the arresting of illegal sand miners connected to Jayasena of the Monaragala District, who had in turn asked the IGP for “relief”.

Accordingly, the Cabinet Minister had allegedly exerted pressure on Police officers to release three men who were arrested while sand mining on the banks of Kumbukkan oya on 27 December. The Minister had reportedly urged the Police officers at the arresting station, including senior officers overlooking the area, to release the offenders, stating they were men recruited to build her house.

However, the Police had withstood the pressure upon instructions from Lathif and produced the three men in Court. Consequent to the calls from the Minister and a subsequent background check on the suspects, it was revealed that they had been convicted for the same offence on a previous occasion. The suspects were reportedly fined Rs. 170,000 each after being produced in Court.

While pressure was building up on the Police over this incident, in a separate incident on 30 January, four men including the brother of a Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman of the area were arrested for allegedly assaulting three Police officers on duty. Four men under the influence of liquor had created a stir at the Monaragala main bus stop, after which three patrolling Policemen had intervened. The four men had allegedly assaulted the Police officers with a sword and fled the area.

Later that night all four men were arrested and brought to the Monaragala Police station. During investigations it was revealed that one of the suspects, who is the brother of the Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman, was under a suspended sentence imposed on him for assaulting and snatching away the duty pistol of a range forest officer previously.

The local government member had then allegedly exerted undue pressure on the Police to release the suspect, to which the Police had not relented. It is reported that DIG Lathif had stood his ground and instructed the local Police to act according to the law, which irked the P.S. member and his colleagues.

This saga has resulted in many questions being raised as to the fate of Police officers who attempt to follow the law. Sri Lankan Police are frequently slammed for supporting politicians and failing to be independent, but the root causes for this are never addressed. A prime example is how Cabinet Spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella tried to skip past the slippery question when cornered at the Cabinet press briefing on Thursday. He insisted that since the suggestive phone call has not been proved, Jayasena could not be charged with abuse of power. Yet, when pressed on the ethics of such a move, he reluctantly admitted that it was an ill-advised step for a Cabinet minister to make.

The deeply corrupt actions of provincial politicians that happen with the full knowledge and sometimes support of central ministers is no secret. The only victim in this instance is the law and the people who, even at the cost of their careers, attempt to uphold it.

Assessing strategic influence in Indian foreign policy

INDIA is the second most populated country and one of the fastest growing economies. It has deep-seated roots in democratic traditions that shaped its political landscape. It has a vibrant political culture where people of India cherish the free media, basic political rights and the respect for rule of law. Its ethnic and linguistic diversity is beyond compare.

The Union of India had been held for six decades without any visible tendency towards separation. Its Federal Constitution fostered a unique balance between the central and state governments despite several constitutional issues.

The Constitution of India has been subjected to 115 amendment bills, out of which only 97 bills have been passed by the Legislature. None of these amendments altered the “basis structure of the constitution – viz, the supremacy of the Constitution, a republican and democratic form of government, the secular character of the Constitution, the maintenance of the separation of powers and the federal character of the Constitution.

The success of the Indian Planning Commission could be gauged from the economic miracle of India. The Planning Commission continues to produce development plans for India and this exercise has been in operation since 1951. The current predictions of the Planning Commission are to accelerate GDP growth from 8% to 10% and then maintain at 10% in order to double per capita income by 2016 and also to keep unemployment below 5%.

Indian economic achievements are second to none in the world and it still has a huge potential and this could be achieved through greater cohesion in economic development and tackling other macro and micro economic issues that hamper development.

The global power politics have undergone tremendous changes from the Cold War to Perestroika. The global order had yet again been transformed drastically when terrorists struck New York on 11 September. This enabled the formation of coalition of countries beset with similar issues and enabled to form overt and covert strategic partnerships in combating international terrorism. The role of India in combating international terrorism was crucial. When Pakistan supported US in pursuing Al-Qaeda and Taliban, the strategic equation between of Indian and Pakistan too changed.

Improved relations with US Government

India was one of the pioneers and founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement of 1961. Geopolitical necessities compelled India to foster closer relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The closer ties with Soviet Union had adverse political ramifications and relations with the US had been in keeping with India’s democratic political tradition. With the demise of Soviet Union in 1991, India began to review its foreign policy in a uni-polar world, and took steps to revive closer ties with the European Union and the United States.

In order to boost trade with Western powers, and in view of the ever-increasing economy and the growth of trade, the close links between the Indian and American computer



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and internet industries, and the reversal in 2008 of the long-standing US opposition to India’s nuclear program, two countries today share an extensive cultural, strategic, military, and economic relationship. There is huge potential to upgrade the relations between India and the US and media reports indicate that the US regularly consults India over domestic political issues of Asian countries, including our own backyard.

The economic and military ascendancy of China also provided fresh insights into transforming US foreign policy options and US foreign policy recognised that India is a strategic partner not only in countering terrorism but keeping China at bay.

The rapid growth of China and its influence in the Indian Ocean region has many manifestations. The Indian Navy is under rapid modernisation plans and the fleet of aircraft carriers too would be increased to meet the increasing threat from China. The only wary both countries are concerned with is the lack of intelligence on the secret defence research in China.

China has already proven that it has the ability to target satellites. China’s military budget is far in excess of India and second only to the US. There is also potential for India coming under US missile defence umbrella and India could play a very pivotal role in joint military exercises and defence research with US institutions.

Brig. Arun Sahgal says major issues defining India-China relations are geopolitical factors and the perception of the Chinese leadership on India’s rise and its long term implications. The moot question is when and under what circumstances can “competition” turn into “conflict.” China is not a “status quo” power and can be expected to react should it feel threatened. Tibet could become a tipping point. India sees it as a cultural buffer; any change in status could be inimical to its interest.

Both sides being civilisational states are unlikely to be accommodating on mutually-acceptable terms or through coercion. The boundary issue and Tibet are likely to remain intractable. Despite improvement in relations, undercurrents of hostility are unlikely to fade in short to medium term (India China Military Balance – Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies www.ipcs.org).

Strategic influence

India has had cordial and friendly relations with Asian countries except Pakistan. India fielded considerable influence with South Asian and other Asian countries. The strategic influence of India however could not resist the growing Chinese influence in the regions. The

covert encirclement policy of China could not be a match for India’s strategic influence. This was a strategic failure on the part of Indian foreign policy makers. It still has time to contain the Chinese influence in the region.

The policy makers in Delhi had failed to appreciate long term impact of ever-growing Chinese influence in the region. Has the matter been taken seriously by the policy analysts in Delhi? What remedial measures have been taken or being contemplated to stem the Chinese influence in the region? Has the Indian Government made its presence felt in the capitals of South Asia? Does the Indian foreign policy require a paradigm shift in its approach to Chinese influence in the region? How has the regional issues centred on the diplomatic manoeuvres that could be utilised to contain regions falling into Chinese

hands? Could India play a much bigger role in economic development of its neighbours than what China is prepared to undertake or has undertaken? What strategic role can the Indian industry play in investing in regional countries and thereby influencing the foreign policy decisions of its neighbours?

Indian private sector investments will depend on business logic and return on investments however a new equation could be introduced if incentives are offered for such overseas investment by the Indian entrepreneurs. Key investments in power and energy would certainly dilute further for Chinese expansion plans. Pakistan is a key ally of China and there is no reversing the fact that this will be another permanent secret Chinese front against India. There are reports that China is also active in Bangladesh.

The New York Times says: “These initiatives are irking India, whose Government worries that China is expanding its sphere of regional influence by surrounding India with a ‘string of pearls’ that could eventually undermine India’s pre-eminence and potentially rise to an economic and security threat.”

“There is a method in the madness in terms of where they are locating their ports and staging points,” Kanwal Sibal, a former Indian foreign secretary who is now a member of the government’s National Security Advisory Board, said of China. “This kind of effort is aimed at counterbalancing and undermining India’s natural influence in these areas.”

As far back as 1993, this writer had envisaged a massive strategic oil reserve for Japan in the wake of first Gulf War and had Japan invested in a reserve a different political landscape would have evolved (<http://www.ft.lk/2012/05/11/strategic-oil-reserve-for-japan-in-hambantota/>).

An interesting statement came from Sri Lanka’s High Commissioner in Delhi Prasad Kariyawasam, who is of the opinion that “strategic balance in the Indian Ocean should not be altered”. The statement should reflect with the ground realities that over-relying on Chinese investment may be too costly for Sri Lanka in the long run. The High Commissioner tends to assert that India is the all-powerful country in this vast region and that status quo must not be altered. It is highly unlikely that Sri Lanka would accede to any request from China that would be detrimental to our historic relations with India.

(The writer is a freelance journalist and a political lobbying and government affairs consultant. He is also a member of the American Association of Political Consultants.)

Guest Column



By Srinath Fernando



CONSPIRACY DESK

By Dinesh Watawana

NOW that we have a gigantesque Cabinet, there’s the insatiable demand for more tables and chairs as well to complete the hippodrome. Admin types are said to be overwhelmed with mile-long requisitions for goodies including tables and chairs and the news is that we’ll soon have a Minister of Tables and Chairs to rise to the clamours of ministerial drudges longing to serve us.

A Ministerial wannabe still standing at the door to the big Cabinet said that there’s elbowroom for more eager-beavers inside summing that he was hopeful the handful of MPs still without a portfolio may at least get new desks and chairs if not Cabinet comforts. A new committee has been appointed to look into suit-

Sit down, stand up; long live the MPs

able subjects to which the MPs may be appointed.

But all news is not good for the ministerial bandwagon. Rising cost of public expenditure and drying up of funds from IMF may mean all public officials being asked to sit on the ground. There’s more reason for doing just that.

A new study reveals examining a person’s ability to sit down and then rise from the floor could provide salutary insight into their haleness, longevity and in the case of our well-endowed politicians, their usefulness to the country.

Reports from Brazil say that researchers have identified an absorbing link between a person’s ability to sit and rise from the floor and the number of years he will actually live. In a remarkable indictment the study published in the European Journal of Cardiovascular Prevention said there was a risk of being 6.5 times more likely to die in the next six years based on an individual’s ability to pass the test which

included over 2,000 people aged 51 to 80 being asked to sit down on the floor and then stand back up using as little support as possible.

In a stunning development 159 of the 2,000 volunteers died during the course of the study, and guess what, they were from among the group that had the most trouble getting up and down. The test used by the researchers required people to sit on the floor from a standing position and then return to a standing position. Speed wasn’t a factor in the scoring, but support was.

When asked if this news could spell a dramatic change in the political terra firma, Minister of Health said that citizens need not panic as politicians are blessed with longevity and good fortune, irrespective of their size and stature. “You may hear of ordinary citizens succumbing to illness and ill-fortune but how often do you hear similar fate striking politicians?” he asked. Even lightning only strikes ordinary citizens, he illustrated his point. In

the rare instant that it does happen, they’ll be right back in business; yes, just like in the cartoons!

An interesting mail from Renuka Kulanayagam said that she didn’t find my spiel on Valentine amusing, bawling out the universal festivity as a vicious plot by the commercial world. There was no response to my query as to if marriage was a similar conspiracy to clean up men of their kitty. But she does have a point. Why show your love and passion just one day of the week? There’s a long weekend and a whole year ahead of me.

I think I’ll get busy! You, too, Kulanayagam.

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